

# LOVE YOUR PARKS



## THE LYP CAMPAIGN

Your parks support you, and right now, parks need love. Love Your Parks aims to build a path to support the equitable, long-term sustainability of the parks system through community education and action. The campaign includes three focus areas around Parks: 1 - Benefits, 2 - Funding Needs, and 3 - Call to Action.

### 1 - PARKS ARE LIFE: BENEFITS

- Parks are crucial to the physical, mental, and emotional wellness of our community. Parks services contribute to the health of everyone.
- Parks are essential to supporting the health of our lands, waters, wildlife, plants, and trees. They clean our air, process water, and provide habitat.
- Parks are secret economic engines that increase property values, improving the local tax base. Studies show that property values surrounding parks are generally higher. Parks are also cited among the top three reasons for relocation.
- Parks are a primary contributor to our quality of life and a direct reflection of our community. They represent our social identity and are one of the most important factors that make a community livable.

### 2 - IT'S NOT WORKING: FUNDING NEEDS

- County residents contribute around \$1.50 per month to Parks through taxes (which equals about \$0.32 per year for every park). This makes up only ~40% of Parks annual operating budget.
- The remaining ~60% of Parks' operating budget is funded through revenues from user fees and sales.
- Parks receives little-to-no funding from the state because it is a non-mandated service.

- Full-time staff have been cut from 900 employees to 240 over the last 20 years. At the same time, our system footprint and services have expanded.
- There's nothing left to trim but services. Over the past decade, operations and commodities (supplies) have been cut past lean. Our staff have carried the burden of these cuts for years, doing more with less and less.
- Parks struggles to fund its annual operating budget; the county is unable to adequately fund the ~\$400 million in Parks' deferred maintenance and capital costs.

### 3 - COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

**We know you want to help, and right now, these are the most impactful things YOU can do!**

#### VOLUNTEER

It doesn't need to be fancy. On your next walk in the park, bring along a garbage bag and fill it up. Throw bag in trash. Repeat. Believe it or not, your help will go a long way!

#### DONATE

To the Milwaukee Parks Foundation. You didn't know we have a foundation? We do! And they're awesome. Any amount is welcome, and every little bit helps no matter how big or small.

#### SHARE YOUR STORY

Why do you love Milwaukee County Parks? We want to know! We are collecting your stories about why parks matter to you... we'd like your statements, your videos, your testimonials. We'll be compiling them to create our collective story of how we love our parks.

**Download our app to do ALL these things!**  
[LoveYourParksMKE.com](http://LoveYourParksMKE.com)



## PARKS & RACIAL EQUITY

We know that historically government has played a role in creating and perpetuating disparities in our communities of color. Parks is a part of the solution, committed to advancing the County's vision that...

**By achieving racial equity, Milwaukee is the healthiest county in Wisconsin.**

## IMPACTS OF COVID-19

**Parks has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in all-time staffing lows, county spending freezes, and revenue losses** from the closure and delayed opening of the majority of our revenue-generating activities and facilities. Parks is projecting a \$10 million deficit in 2020 and scrambling to fill it.

Milwaukee County Parks system funding has been broken for years, so going back to the way things were pre-COVID won't provide a long-term fix. Instead, **we need to grow community support to build back better and find innovative, creative ways to fund our parks in the future.** This summer our residents are experiencing what a summer in Milwaukee is like without many of the park services they love, and with parks in peril, we hope our community will rally around parks to ensure they don't just survive but thrive.

## MORE BACKGROUND

We know that Milwaukee County residents love their parks, but many residents are not aware that **Milwaukee County parks are a non-mandated service.** This means that county governments deliver state mandated services to their community, and they can also provide additional services their community wants. In tough fiscal times, mandated services must be funded. **Since Parks are not mandated, there is no legal requirement to fund them, so they are often one of the first county services to be cut.**

Additionally, **the Parks department relies on revenue to fund around 60% of its annual operating budget.** Parks typically generates more than half its annual budget through user fees from things like golf, beer gardens, picnic rentals, and more. The national average for Parks & Recreation department revenue generation is a striking 23% of their annual operating budgets and most of these departments are heavy in programming. Milwaukee County Parks is light in programming and heavy in providing facilities.

**Parks funding has been in jeopardy for some time, deferred maintenance has long been an issue, and the impacts of COVID-19 are adding to the extreme challenges of our non-mandated, revenue-dependent parks system - threatening its long-term viability.**



## GET THIS! FUN FACTS

- Parks' trail system laid end-to-end would stretch all the way to Green Bay!
- The land managed by Parks is the equivalent of 7,500 Lambeau Fields in size.
- At 15,000+ acres of land, Parks is the largest landowner in the county.
- The entire park system contains roughly the same amount of land as 50 Six Flag Great America's - with each one managed by only 3 full-time staff.
- While a Six Flags season ticket can cost \$140, an average of just \$50 in property taxes per household goes to parks each year (a fraction of a cent per acre).
- Hundreds of small businesses, non-profits and community organizations rely on Milwaukee County Parks to operate!

**Parks are amazing spaces. That need resources.**  
**When we ensure our parks thrive, we will thrive.**